Simple, sustainable advance care planning processes in the MPS aged care setting

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There is increasing evidence to support the importance of advance care planning (ACP) for people with advanced chronic disease. Peel Cluster in Hunter New England Local Health District (HNELHD) has implemented standardised, sustainable (ACP) processes into routine care delivery for aged care residents in Peel MPS facilities.

An annual point prevalent survey identified that ACP process was not well implemented within Peel MPSs. A survey tool was designed to gather data on ACP training undertaken, staff awareness and knowledge of ACP and attitudes towards ACP in their work environment. Results identified that staff were confused by the variety of resources and forms available for ACP use and would prefer a standardised, cluster endorsed suite of resources.

A working group was formed consisting of a MPS manager, nurse representative from each facility, Cluster Palliative Care CNC, ACAT representative and the Cluster Practice Development Officer. Very clear governance and reporting mechanisms were established. The survey results were used to identify gaps and develop strategies to embed ACP practices.

The working group identified ACP processes and resources most appropriate for the MPS environment. Tailored ACP process training packages were developed for the following MPS staff groups in addition to existing ACP online education:

- administration
- health service support
- nurses/allied health/VMOs.

The training included an overview of ACP, use of identified resources and specifically their role associated with ACP in their facility.

Working collaboratively with the Tamworth Base Hospital ACP Steering Committee, (chaired by Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital’s (TRRH) Director, Rural Critical Care and consisting of local RAFCs, Division of GPs, UDRH, practice nurse and TRRH nurses), lead to the development and wide promotion of a cluster endorsed, standardised user-friendly ACP form.

ACP working party delegates became ACP Champions at their local MPS facility. The ACP survey was repeated post Champion support. The survey demonstrated improved staff confidence; increased ACP discussion with residents/family/carers and increased documentation of ACP discussions. The majority of surveyed staff responded positively to recognising and responding to ACP documentation. The annual point prevalent ACP survey
identified a 60% increase in ACP documentation and process improvement in the Peel Cluster MPS.

The project's success was due to increasing staff awareness of ACP, their role in ACP and the introduction of simple resources and processes that were formally integrated into routine care.